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PATRIOTIC

SKETCHES

OF

IRELAND.

PATRIOTIC

SKETCHES

OF

IRELAND,

WRITTEN IN CONNAUGHT.

BY MISS OWENSON.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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PREFACE.

IN that happy age when the first gloss of nature is fresh on every sense, when infant attention hangs eagerly on the tale of fanciful tradition, when the heart trembles to the pathetic, and the imagination revels in the marvellous; it was my destiny to have had the first warmed into feeling—the other, first kindled into ardour, by the pensive legend of national woe, or the romantic tale of national heroism.

To have caught from the paternal

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lip, the transmitted "song of other times," breathed in the native strains of my native country, and emulous of the lay which ingrafted on the simple sensations of childhood the glowing sensibilities of maturer life, early to have learnt to lisp its echo, and to awaken the first tones of my infant lyre to the inspirations of national enthusiasm.

In a more advanced period of existence, I became the resident of those scenes sacred to the airy images of my childhood's wonder; from whence tradition still sends forth her tale of interest; and where to the heated fancy, the *genius of Ire-*

land still seems to droop over her silenced harp, and at intervals to snatch from its tremulous chords, a strain, which like the music of her own bards is "sweet, though mournful to the soul."

Here, revelling in the ever ready *cead mile faltra* of Milesian cordiality, the frequent visitant of the peasant's hut, the sometimes guest of the chieftain's mansion, my heart in its general intercourse, thus touched on the two extremes of Irish wretchedness and Irish comfort. While in the genuine aspect of the national character, whether viewed in the rough-hewn traits of immo-

dified illiteracy, or the polished features of educated refinement, my mind still found a sanction for that national partiality, which if not an intuitive principle, at least, formed the first of its imbibed ideas.

It was requisite therefore I should leave my native country to learn the turpitude, degradation, ferocity, and inconsequence of her offspring; the miseries of her present, and the falsity of the recorded splendours of her ancient state. This ungracious information I acquired during a short tour through a sister isle; and it was in the course of one of the many conversations which occurred on the

subject of my (always termed) "unhappy country," that a hint casually suggested, formed the origin of a little work, which has since appeared under the title of the "*Wild Irish Girl.*" Yet I came to the self-devoted task, with a diffidence proportioned to the ardour which instigated me to the attempt; for as a *woman*, a *young woman*, and an *Irish woman*, I felt all the delicacy of undertaking a work which had for the professed theme of its discussion, circumstances of national import, and national interest.

But though I meant not to appear on the list of opposition as a fairy

amazon, armed with a pebble and a sling, against a host of gigantic prejudices: although to compose a national defence, to ward the shaft of opprobrium hurled at the character of my country, to extenuate the effects or expose the causes of its popular discontents, was as incompatible with my sex and years, as with my trivial talent, and limited powers; yet I was still aware that in the historic page, recent details, and existing circumstances of Irish story, lived many a record of Irish virtue, Irish genius, and Irish heroism, which the simplicity of truth alone was sufficient to delineate; many

a tale of pathos which woman's heart could warmest feel, and truest tell, and many a trait of romantic colouring and chivalrous refinement, which woman's fancy fondest contemplates and best depicts:

Still however in that era of life, when the faculties of the mind abandon themselves to the wild impulse of imagination, or fondly hover round the local territories of the heart, I found it difficult and uninteresting to confine myself to a mere relation of facts; and in preference to a cold detail of "flat realities," determined on the composition of a national novel, spun from

those materials which the ancient and modern history, manners, and habits of my country supplied; and while fiction wove her airy web, to draw the brightest tints of her variegated tissue from the deathless colouring of truth.

To blend the imaginary though probable incident with the interesting fact, to authenticate the questioned refinement of ancient habits, by the testimony of living modes, faithfully to delineate what I had intimately observed, and to found my opinions on that medium which ever vibrates between the partial delineation of national prejudice, on

one side, and the exaggerated details of foreign antipathy on the other; such was the prospectus my wishes dared to draw. If I failed in their accomplishment, that failure arose from the mediocrity of very limited talents, which I soon found were inadequate to realize all my heart dictated, or my hopes conceived.

The world however had the indulgence to tolerate the execution in favour of the motive, and the reception with which it honoured "the Wild Irish Girl," was such as surpassed my most sanguine expectations, and stimulated me to further

exertion in that cause, which it is impossible to examine without interest, or to embrace without enthusiasm. Politics can never be a woman's science; but patriotism must naturally be a woman's sentiment. It is inseparably connected with all those ties of tenderness which her heart is calculated to cherish, and though the energy of the citizen may not animate her feelings to acts of national heroism, the fondness of the child, the mistress, the wife and the mother, must warm and ennoble them into sentiments of national affection. For myself, while my heart still triumphs in the principle which

leads me to effuse over the world's ear the "native wood-notes wild" of my native country, I would wish it to be believed that I have ever swept the strings of the Irish harp with the tremulous touch of conscious inability; that in humbly endeavouring to revive the faded shamrock, that which droops round my country's emblem, I have ever brought to the grateful effort an anxious hope, rather than a sanguine expectation of success; and that in touching on the grievances of the lower orders of my countrymen, and their fatal but consequent effects, unswayed by interest, unbiassed by partiality, the

hope of wooing the attention of abler minds to a subject on which my own has long dwelt with ineffectual anxiety, and unavailing regret, has been the sole motive of the feeble and individual efforts, I now humbly submit to the world's consideration.

SIDNEY OWENSON.

PATRIOTIC

SKETCHES,

&c.

SKETCH I.

THE scenery which environs the town of Sligo * is bold, irregular, and picturesque: and though despoiled of those luxurious woods which once (in common with the rest of the island)

* Situated in the county of Sligo, province of Connaught, 105 miles from Dublin. It is a borough, post, and fair town.

enriched its aspect, it still preserves many of those traits which constitute the perfection of landscape; hanging over a beautiful bay formed by the influx of the "steep Atlantic," sheltered by lofty mountains, and reposing almost at the brow of a hill along whose base the river Gitley steals its devious way. The high road * by which it is approached for the last twenty miles, winds through a scene of romantic variety, which frequently combines the most cultivated and harmonious traits, with the wildest and most abrupt images

* The northern road.

of scenic beauty. The groves, the lakes, the enchanting islands, and all the glowing charms of an Italian scenery which diffuses itself over the picturesque and cultivated scenes of Florence-court *, are suddenly replaced by a dreary heath, and a bold and continued mass of rocks, through which nature, time, and art, seem to have cut a deep and narrow defile which, entered at that hour sacred to the sombre grandeur of the true sublime, awakens in the heart of the traveller such a warning as the entrance to Danté's Inferno holds out.

* The seat of the earl of Inniskillen.

I left Dublin in the autumn of 1806, with the intention of rambling through such scenes in the north-west of Connaught as I had not yet visited; and it was here my little journey began to receive its first decided character of interest; it was here that the impression made on my imagination insensibly communicated to memory the first of those rough sketches which, divested of the delicate pencil, touch the *pentimenti* (to use a technical phrase) of studied art, and practised judgment. I have copied with the same rude simplicity with which they were drawn in the moment of passing observation, as

the heart was touched by objects of moral interest, or the fancy awakened by scenes of natural beauty. I had watched the last beam of the setting sun stealing his faded splendours from the last of those lakes which precede the entrance of the cavern-path, and the broken and irregular masses of rock which arose pyramidically on either side, partially caught the retreating glow of the horizon, and displayed the greatest variety of light and shadow, till gradually opening, a rich and expansive prospect broke on the eye: the lakes and fairy land of Hazle-

wood*, the bold attitude of Benbubin, the beetling brow of Knock-na-bee †, the ocean's gleaming line, commingling with the horizon, and the town of Sligo spreading irregularly along the base of a lofty hill, crowned with meadows, and successively betrayed by the expanding view; till the softening influence of twilight mellowed every outline into air, and dissolved every object into one mild and indistinct hue.

The literal meaning of the word

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* The seat of Owen Wynn, esq.

† In English, "*the hill of the king.*"

Sligo, is the "*town of shells,*" and the derivation of the epithet is traced by local history and oral tradition to the following curious origin. Many of the inhabitants of Esdera (now Ballysidore), a flourishing and neighbouring town, having been driven by the vicissitudes of civil dissension from their native place, fled to the shore, and of the shells and pebbles flung by the violence of the tide along the coast, erected a number of huts, which formed the infancy of Sligo. Sligo is now a large opulent and commercial town, while its parent city is one of the most ruinous and wretched villages in the province:

still distinguished for the beauty of its situation and the romantic wildness of its environs. The vicissitudes of those two little places present us an epitome of the fate of all earthly states. The routine of all human, as of all natural events, knows no variability in its cause or its effects; and the rise, climateric, decline, and fall of every empire, are but the counterpart of that which has preceded it. Babylon (says a celebrated French philosopher), " qui n'a plus que des monceaux de terre fouillée, a occupé sur la rive orientale un espace de six lieues de longueur, et *Thebes aux cent palais* est aujourd'hui reduite à la

condition d'un misérable village." —" Babylon, the site of which is now distinguished only by the inequalities of the ground, formerly occupied a length of six leagues; and Thebes with its hundred gates (or palaces) is reduced to the condition of a wretched village."—Thus by the unvaried and general laws of nature a line of circumvallation seems drawn round the efforts of all human exertion, and limits the progress of all human greatness; and those transitions of power from the mighty to the lesser, which partially and individually considered, seem

stamped with the character of instability, are in fact the great and irrefragable proofs of the general harmony and order of the whole.

SKETCH II.

THE recurrence of a scene, a sentiment, or a sensation, peculiar to the early stages of existence, owes much of the magic charm which accompanies it to the medium through which it is viewed. Memory is too warmly imbued with the glow of imagination, not to shed over the image which it preserves a prismatic hue; and the perception of mind that attends an actual feeling, is perhaps less forcible (and certainly less gra-

cious) than that emotion with which it is contemplated in the vision of memory, when fancy lends it a superadded charm, and we hang with a tender regret upon its faded recollection.

In days of childhood, in the happy recess of school-holidays, I have caught a distant view of Sligo abbey, in a moment of such felicity as childhood only experiences, "when we feel that we are happier than we know." An idea of its venerable ruins had insensibly associated itself with the remembrance of the lively susceptibility I then possessed, to

every impression; and that idea still preserving its ascendancy in my mind, rendered the object that gave rise to it, an object of peculiar interest, and ardent curiosity.

I have always loved those scenes which connect the pleasures of intellect with those of sense, which are equally dear to reflection and to fancy, over which the mental sympathies extend themselves, and where the heart and the eye repose with equal satisfaction and delight; and as I involved myself amidst the ruins of Sligo abbey, where doubtless

"Many a saint and many a hero trod,"

the beautiful apostrophe of Volney floated on my memory:

"Je vous salue ruines solitaires! Oui: tandis que votre aspect repousse d'un secret effroi les regards du vulgaire, mon cœur trouve à vous contempler le charme des sentimens profonds et des hautes pensées."—"Hail, solitary ruins! Yes: while your appearance excites in vulgar minds a repulsive dread, my heart tastes, in contemplating you, the charm of profound sentiments and elevated thoughts."

The abbey seemed to have mouldered into new beauty, since the

cursory view I had last had of it. Recent decay had touched its cloisters with a painter's hand; and the influence of a few added years, and the vicissitudes of a few successive seasons, had mellowed its once grey tints into a variety of glowing hues, and had enriched its vegetative drapery with more luxuriant masses of foliage.

The abbey, whose former extent and beauty may be calculated from the wreck which time has spared, owes its foundation to Maurice Fitzgerald; who, under the invocation of the Holy Ghost, erected it

for the friars of the order of St. Dominic. Like other religious edifices, it found its sanctity no protection against the ravages of war, and the vicissitudes of civil dissension; and falling a prey to the contending factions of the province, it was pillaged successively in the years 1270, 1360, and 1394: so that in 1414, its revenues were scarcely adequate to the support of twenty friars; while all that the rapine and violence of war had spared, was finally destroyed by an accidental fire. The abbey, however, must have been an object of no trivial consideration to the Romish see; for pope John

XXIII. issued apostolic letters to promote its restoration, and elicited the humble mite of the poor, and the splendid contribution of the rich sinner, through the medium of their salvation, by offering the remission of ten years and forty days penance to all who, on the feasts of the Assumption and St. Patrick, should visit the ruined abbey, and contribute to its repairs. Foremost on the list of its benefactors, stood O'Connor, lord or chief of Sligo, the lineal descendant of the ancient kings of Connaught, and whose posterity still boast that the blood-royal of Ireland flows in their veins. Whatever re-

muneration the pious liberality of the chieftain may have received in the other world, it has at least obtained a deathless testimony in this: for a statue erected to his memory still holds its place unimpaired amidst the surrounding ruins. Its coarse sculpture is strongly illustrative of those rude days, when the progress of genius and reason was opposed by political discord, and religious intolerance: when the infant arts drooped, neglected or oppressed; and when the human mind, directing all its powers to the difficult and doubtful preservation of a harassed existence, checked the operation of its

better faculties, and resigned all its nobler perceptions to the influence of credulity and error.

To accuse heaven of venality, and consider religion as a traffic, may be peculiar to days of ignorance and darkness; but in what age has religion been painted otherwise than selfish? Punishments and rewards have been the invariable agents of faith, and an eternity of enjoyment or of suffering has been still held out to seduce or to impel us to that which Nature teaches and reason confirms.

The ruins of Sligo abbey, though

wildly irregular, are noble in decay. The arched entrance to the chapel, lofty and unimpaired, is still enriched with foliage, and that delicacy of ornament which forms so striking a contrast amidst the sombre heaviness of Gothic architecture. A stone gallery still surrounds the nave of the chapel. The delicate proportions and construction of the eastern window, still in good preservation, are ornamented with Gothic arches and curious tracery; the tower, elevated and conspicuous, has sustained no injury except in a partial dilapidation of its battlements; and three sides of the cloisters that once formed

a large square, are still supported by a range of small fluted pillars, enriched with a variety of devices of the most minute workmanship, and crowned with an arched roof. These interesting ruins spread along an inclined plane, bathed by the river Gitley, which guides the eye (in its meandring course) to the delicious scenery of Hazlewood, and loses itself amidst those charming lakes which reflect on their expansive bosoms the most romantic shores and boldest mountains; while on the other side of the river swells a range of pasturage hills, a distant view of the ocean is partially caught, and a

chain of lofty mountains forms the bas-relief to the animated picture.

Abstracted devotion or monkish luxury could never have found a site more appropriate to holy meditation, and more conducive to laic enjoyment; and the vale of Euzras, which sheltered in its bosom the celebrated abbey of Llanthoni, boasts less of natural charm, in the animated description of Giraldus Cambrensis, than the scenery which once surrounded the abbey of Sligo must have possessed, when the luxuriance of unhewn woods spread their shade over its romantic hills, and the intru-

sion of an ill-built town, neither obscured nor deformed its extensive and varying prospect.

Disposed by a certain tone of mind to behold with a touching interest, a scene never to be viewed with indifference, while a pre-existing train of ideas were refreshed and associated by the corresponding impressions which my senses received from every object around me, I sat down on the tomb of the royal O'Connor, and plucked the weed or blew away the thistle "that waved there its lonely head." The sun was setting in gloomy splendour, and the lofty

angles of the abbey-tower alone caught the reflection of his dying beams, from the summits of the mountains where they still lingered: the horizon betrayed a beautiful gradation of tint, which insensibly softened into the reserved colouring of twilight, while broken hues, and irregular masses of light and shadow, flung through the pillars of the cloisters, or from the high-arched portals of the chapel, harmonized the general outline of the ruins, and shed around such aerial and indistinct forms, as fancy woos to aid the vision of her wildest dream. Nor did she now refuse to " give to airy

nothing a local habitation and a name." Along each mouldering aisle, and gloomy cloister, her creative eye still pursued the close-cowled monk; the haughty abbot, pacing in all the solemn pomp of holy meditation the damp and checquered pavement; or caught the pious chieftain's warrior-form, as he made his sumptuous offering at the altar's foot, followed by the credulous and penitential crowd which the artful policy of John had lured thither, to expiate the past, and purchase the remission of future sins. While the singular and striking ceremonies of a religion, so consonant to the live-

liest powers of imagination, once splendidly celebrated in the now gloomy and ruinous chapel, the brilliant illuminations of tapers, the solemn procession of grey-headed friars, or close-veiled nuns; the meretricious ornaments which the vitiated taste of superstition flings over the pure and simple forms of true religion, and the swelling chaunt of midnight devotion or matins-piety, seemed even now, something more than "the baseless fabric of a vision."

Such scenes are never to be visited with that interest which peculiarly

belongs to them, in the broad glare of day's meridian splendour, since much of their picturesque effect is produced by the solemn stillness of the twilight hour, when the faintest breeze wastes not its sigh upon a "desert air;" and when the dim discoloured light sheds a mystic hue on every object, and peoples the gloomy space with wild and fancied forms. The simplicity of reason, and the purity of truth, though they afford the clearest evidence to the mind, and sublime while they enlighten, deny to fancy that image so dear to her illusory desires; the simple con-

viction of an abstract faith gives no picturesque forms to her wondering gaze, affords no mysteries to her unlicensed wishes. A sensible personified religion is the creed she clings to, where the senses are the medium of belief, and credulity reposes on the enjoyments of imagination. Thus the faith of a Socrates was the faith of a philosopher, but the mythology of Homer was the religion of a poet.

While my eye now rested on those objects that formed a festival to my fancy, which revelled in a

train of visionary ideas full of poetical interest, my mind insensibly recurred to those events and circumstances in the religious and political history of my country, from whence these objects stole their interest; and tracing the sacred footsteps of christianity, from the moment of its admission into Ireland, to the period of its existing influence, I sighed to reflect that those mild tenets by which it preached "peace and good-will to all men," were still opposed by the cold contracted dogmas of intolerance, flinging its gloomy shadow on religion's cheering rays, like the

noxious vapour, which, rising from the corruption of the earth, meets and obscures the beam whose radiance comes from Heaven.

SKETCH III.

POLITICAL philosophy by extending the mind's eye to the whole great scale of civil society, and demonstrating the close-linked dependancies of its remotest parts, affords to the benevolence of the human heart, and the comprehension of the human understanding, a social system, gratifying to the feelings of the one, and ennobling to the faculties of the other.

But that partial view of things

which prejudice loves to sketch, and which self-interest delights to contemplate, sheds over the political sentiments of certain minds, a species of misty influence through which every object is beheld dim and discoloured.

How few are those who dare take into the scope of their political speculation the universal good and welfare of their country, independant of every bias to any sect or any party! How few are they who dare expand their thoughts, and awaken their feelings, to the general well-being of their compatriots, and ha-

zarding their individual effort to its promotion, contemn that chain by which interest * would rivet them to some empowered being on whose influence their own must depend; while every principle of political philanthropy is lost in a timid coincidence with the sentiments and opinions of him who, himself the slave

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* Ce n'est donc point (dit Helvetius) de la méchanceté des hommes dont il faut se plaindre, mais de l'ignorance des législateurs, qui ont toujours mis l'intérêt *particulier en opposition avec l'intérêt général.*——"It is not of the wickedness of mankind," says Helvetius, "that we ought to complain; but of the ignorance of legislators, who have always set private at variance with public interests."

of circumstances, makes the sacrifice of independance in one sense, the purchase of it in another. To one who, reared in retirement, has studied the world but in books; who enters its busy scene full of "the vulgar errors of the wise;" whose romantic mind has taken the bias of its political sentiments from the national enthusiasm of the first Greeks, or the *amor patriæ* of the first Romans; and who unites to these imbibed ideas, an almost innate devotion to the land of his nativity; that species of conduct in politics which is founded on self interest, animated by faction, or imbittered by intolerance,

must excite in the mind of the young, the indigent patriot, the strongest feeling of contempt and abhorrence.

There is in Ireland (and perhaps there is every where) a kind of nondescript characters in politics, tantamount to that which Burke alludes to when he speaks of a certain party who distinguished themselves by the name of "king's men," "by an invidious exclusion (he adds) of the rest of his majesty's most loyal and affectionate subjects." The true, rational, disinterested loyalist, is the most respectable of political charac-

ters; he is a patriot in the best sense of the word; his country only is dearer to him than his king: and while he boldly stands forth as the defender of one against the abuse of power or incroachment of royal prerogative, and as the champion of the other against the rage of popular inebriety or anarchical tumult, his property and his life are cheerfully risked, and nobly devoted, to the preservation of the respective rights and safeties of both.

But in Ireland, among the many who are dignified with the name of loyalist, there are some who, mis-

taking the principle, injure the cause they affect to support; who, in debasing their own country, injure that empire of which it is a constituent part; and who, false to the land which gave them birth, cannot be true to that sovereign to whose heart and interest that country is (or ought to be) endeared. "If Ireland be not safe, we (the English) cannot be safe,"* says sir Edward Coke,

* The language of that sound and perfect policy which has its basis in truth and philanthropy, has been ever the same in all ages and in all countries; and Lord Howick, in his eloquent speech upon a late momentous question, delivers an opinion to the same effect, and

when agreeing with his friend Sir John Davies on the political independance of Ireland *. It was thus a crown-officer of England wisely thought, and boldly spoke: it has however been since reserved for certain orders of Irishmen to discover, that to foment by artful or coercive

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almost in the same words as those used by sir E. Coke: "If Ireland were rendered insecure, the establishment of England would be exposed to greater danger than any which could possibly result from such a boon to the Catholics," &c.

* It is a circumstance not a little to the honour of Ireland, that scarce any man ever enjoyed the office of her government, who did not prove for ever after her strenuous defender.

measures the disturbances in Ireland, to perpetuate every party-feud, retrace every fading character of religious distinction, give the colouring of rebellion to every local complaint or domestic commotion (of which their own conduct to the lower orders is generally the efficient cause), and to brand the character of their country with the epithets of wretched, deluded, and unhappy, is to conduce to the honour of England, and to demonstrate their own attachment to the British government!

How happy is England to find

in the noblest of her sons, the most devoted of her champions! Enthusiastic even to prejudice in her favour,

"Their first best country ever is at home;"

while Ireland fondly sighs to produce (in all a mother's pride) those of her progeny, who, uniting the influence of high rank to the powers of opulence, the pure spirit of patriotism to the steady sentiment of loyalty, and the ardent love of freedom to that of rational subordination, might stand forth at once her pride, protection, and defence. Yet what country ever flourished in which the honour of national pride was

extinct?* what country ever obtained esteem from other nations, when it was denied to her by her own sons? It is true that the great mass of the people of Ireland are attached to their country with an idolatrous, but ineffectual fondness, that increases in a ratio with her struggles and her sufferings: but the union of power and influence rests not always with those who would exert both to the promotion of their country's good; and while the domesticated enemies of

* "Le bonheur des peuples dépend et de la félicité dont ils jouissent au-dedans, et du respect qu'ils inspirent au-dehors."—"The welfare of a nation depends on the happiness which it enjoys within itself, and the respect with which it inspires others."—*Helvetius.*

Ireland (even from the midst of the luxurious asylum which she affords them) blast forth the tale of her degradation with Stentorian lungs, the attachment of her numerous and unalienated children is breathed in tender murmurs or indignant sighs; and like the tones of her own harp, vibrates in sad and plaintive fondness unheard or unheeded. It is finely observed by Voltaire, that "Le genre humain seroit trop malheureux s'il étoit aussi prêt de commettre des choses atroces, que de les croire;"* and

* "The condition of mankind would be wretched indeed, if they were as prone to commit atrocities as to believe tales of them."

were the national character of the Irish as corrupt as the tongue of prejudice asserts; it must have long since drawn down upon its own iniquities that retribution, which an apostacy from the moral influence of nature and reason inevitably incurs in a general and national, as well as in an individual and personal sense. To speak indeed of the vices of any country independant of its police or legislation, is perhaps to speak in vulgar language, and under the influence of vulgar prejudice.

One of the greatest philosophers of the last age, considers the series of

illustrious actions ascribed to the Greeks and Romans of a certain period, as the result of that address by which their legislators blinded the individual with the public interest, "in a union of which (he adds) consists the true spirit of laws." In spite, however, of the obstacles which have offered themselves to the progress of the national virtues and national prosperity of Ireland, she can yet "lift her fair head on high," while she beholds so many of her sons weaving the laurel round their victor-brows in those distant lands where the hand of cold intolerance cannot tear it from the hero's grasp;

and while on her own green shores, native genius and native talent blush not to call her mother, and boast their inspiration is their country's love.

SKETCH IV.

About three miles from the town of Sligo, lies a beautiful spot, called the glen of Knock-na-ree, from the bold and romantic mountains, along whose base it winds the road which leads to it from the town; it combines many charms of ocean scenery, with many traits of picturesque landscape. The little maritime village of Gibraltar, whose white huts appear glittering among

the rocks that skirt the irregular coast; the cloud-capped heights of Benbullen and Knock-na-ree, with a distant view of the island of Innismurry,* and a faint undulating line

* The island of Innismurry is celebrated in Irish legend, and is still remarkable for the manners, dress, and customs of its inhabitants. The ruins of the chapel of St. Columbkill, and part of the crosier of St. Molaire, are still shewn there as relics of the two most famous saints in the calendar of Irish canonization; the latter, who was confessor to Columbkill, banished him from Innismurry, his favourite retreat, to Scotland, as a penance for three desperate battles the ambition of his penitent had caused to be fought. The Irish seem to have held all islands in a superstitious veneration. In the river Shannon, the romantic island of Iniscailtre contains the ruins of seven

of the coast of Ulster; unite within the scope of a coup-d'œil, a picture highly animated and romantic. The direct path to the glen is tracked through an expansive meadow, which slopes from the foot of Knock-na-ree towards the bay, and terminating in a certain point, by a narrow defile, forms the entrance of the glen, which winds between a double range of rocks for more than a mile. This romantic glen, rich in all that irregularity so essential to

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churches and a round tower; and in another of its islands, an anchorite tower 120 feet high, with the ruins of eleven churches, are, I am told, still visible.

the true picturesque, seems to have been produced by some convulsion of nature; and the rocks in many places are so perfectly concave and convex, that it appears as if another shock would unite them again into one solid mass.

The strained eye becomes dazzled in the contemplation of their altitude, while it reposes with delight on the beautiful variety of vivid hues which stain their shelving sides; on the rich foliage of the shrubs that hang their fantastic drapery over the rugged projections; or on the bending trees which seem to shoot

from their deep crevices without the aid of earth to nourish their bare and interwoven roots: while innumerable torrents, dashing from the pointed summits of the highest cliffs, flow at their base in one pellucid stream; or rushing with congregated force over roots of trees, or projecting rocks, fall into some deep cavity, and form an elevated and natural bason, shaded by the luxuriancy of the overhanging shrubs.

The glen is sometimes overflown by these torrents, while the immense masses of rock (covered with moss and lichens) which they force down

at intervals in their steep descent, construct, for the steps of the adventurous wanderer, a species of little causey; and the overarching of the cliffs seems to threaten destruction from above; or, by a conjunction of their respective shrubs, forms a leafy canopy almost impervious to the beams of the sun. That even some degree of moral charm should not be wanting to this little Vaucluse, the rocks in many places assume the appearance of spacious ruins, sometimes rising in light and spiral shafts, sometimes rudely broken in irregular masses; while fancied cloisters, imaginary fortresses, and ideal castles,

present themselves to the eye amidst the creeping underwood and clustering shrubs, by which their grotesque forms are partially veiled. Where the gloom seems deepest, and the opposite rocks almost knit their towering summits, the glen abruptly terminates, and a beautiful sea-coast suddenly bursts upon the view: the bay reflecting on its bosom the opposite shores, spangled with white houses; the mountains of Donega floating like vapours in the haze of distance; and as a back-ground to the animated landscape, the mountain of Knock-na-ree, rising majestically from behind the rocky sides

of the glen which reposes at its base.

Sugna-clogh, or the Giant's Grave, near the town of Sligo, excites a different interest from that awakened by the glen of Knock-na-ree. Several immense stones are raised in a very curious and romantic manner, upon the ends of others, which seem pitched perpendicularly into the earth, and give to the eye a miniature representation of Stonehenge on Salisbury-plain.

Sugna-clogh is one of those puzzling relics of other times, with which

antiquarian ingenuity delights to amuse itself; but to the mind that seeks a picturesque effect, or moral interest, in every object, it merely excites a transient curiosity which the traditional lore of the country is unable to gratify.

SKETCH V.

It is observed by Zimmerman, that "in the unvaried stillness and stagnation of small remote places, lie buried an acrimony and rancour of the passions, rarely found in great cities." That mind indeed must be endued with great native strength, over which a certain peculiarity of situation holds no influence; which can breathe the spirit of liberty beneath the lash of despotism, be

true to nature where art only reigns, and in a range of action limited within a narrow circle, disdain to graduate its sentiments and opinions on a scale proportionably contracted.

From the general order of things, the lesser towns of every country must still be as centres, to which the radii of illiberality and cabal point with the greatest force; and Ireland perhaps, beyond any other country in Europe, furnishes the strongest testimony to the truth of the assertion. That destructive spirit of intolerance in religion, and of faction in politics, which has so long and

fatally diffused its noxious influence over the whole kingdom (and which we hope is now happily fading away in its leading cities), may still be found flourishing in all its pristine vigour, in the hearts of those little towns and great villages, where both are still nurtured by the local intimacy and opinionative distance of those who perhaps agree in fundamentals, and differ only in points merely speculative; where, on one side, opposition is fed by the jealousy of conscious degradation, and on the other, by the pride of conscious prerogative: where each, solely bent on the support of its respective tenets,

allows no modification in political principle or religious opinion; where all must be considered as the extreme of orthodox zeal or heterodox error, as the coarse caricature of loyalty or wild outline of rebellion; and where the respective prejudices of each party, tear away in their vortex every unbiassed sentiment of public good, every generous principle of patriotic feeling, and sacrifice at the shrine of religious and political intolerance, the peace, the welfare, and the prosperity, of a nation.*

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* "The two factions of protestant and catholic, more intent on thwarting each

To minds which slavery has not broken, nor oppression debased, the consciousness of political inferiority and national inconsequence must ever bring with it a sensitive pride, a tenacious reserve, a suspicious timidity, and an irritability of spirit, which are only to be dissipated by the conciliating advances of that superior influence under which a series of certain events has placed them: and when two distinct parties are internally divided by a difference in religious

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other, than in maintaining their mutual rights, became an easy prey," &c. *Macaulay's History of England*, vol. ii. p. 177.

faith, by an inequality of political establishment, and externally coalesced by local circumstances and certain ties of denization common to both; where prerogative rests on one side, and submission on the other; the natural suspicions, the cautious vigilant diffidence, of the subordinate party, are only to be seduced into amity, or warmed into confidence, by the open, ingenuous, volunteering liberality of the supreme power.*

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* "Sure I am (says Edmund Burke) that there have been thousands in Ireland who have never conversed with a Roman-catholic in their whole lives, unless they happened to talk with

But in that dominant sect which, by adopting a rational scepticism to

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their gardener's workman, or to ask their way when they had lost it in their sports, or at best who had only associated with ex-footmen or other domestics of the third or fourth order; and so averse were they some time ago to have them near their persons, that they would not employ even those who would never find their way beyond their stable. I well remember a great, and in many respects a good man, who advertised for a blacksmith, but at the same time added, 'he must be a protestant.' It is impossible that such a state of things (though natural goodness in many persons will undoubtedly make exceptions) must not produce alienation on the one side, and pride and insolence on the other."

It is to be hoped, and indeed to be believed, that the fatal spirit of prejudice thus strongly adverted to by Burke, is daily losing its influ-

antiquated error, may be naturally supposed to possess the tolerance towards others which it has claimed for itself, dwells there that mild, that generous, and all-conciliating spirit of charity, which, like the bow of heaven's promise, flings the encircling arch of its mercy round the

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ence; for myself, though one among the many in my own country who have been educated in the most rigid adherence to the tenets of the church of England, I should, like the poor Maritornes of Cervantes, think myself endowed with very few "sketches and shadows of christianity," were I to confine virtue to sect; or make the speculative theory of opinion the test of moral excellence, or proof of human perfection.

whole earth, and receives within the great compass of its indulgence every sect and every persuasion? Dwells there among those who vaunt their own abhorrence of fanaticism and bigotry, that pure and sole religion which, in considering the great and only Object of the universal worship of mankind, neither derides nor reviles the medium through which it flows? Does it indiscriminately betray that open smiling confidence which unnerves the hand of vengeance, inspires affection, and turns the gall of hatred to the "milk of human kindness?" Does it feel for the political subjection of a com-

patriot, but not established sect; endeavour to counteract the effects of an erroneous and fatal policy, by opposing the endeared rites of social conciliation to the chilling influence of a penal code; of private intercourse to public distinction; and by endeavouring to produce that compatriot felicity, that national unanimity and brotherly love, over which a fanatical dogma, or an intolerant law, holds no jurisdiction? If these interrogations can be answered by an undeniable affirmative of actual demonstration, what has Ireland to fear? what has Ireland to wish? The unanimity of a nation, and the

mutual confidence and confederation of her sons, are the firmest basis of her prosperity, and the strongest bulwark of her freedom.

The odium of bigotry is generally thrown upon the subordinate sect of every country. Bigotry, however, is in fact the cosmopolite of religion, and adheres with more or less influence to every mode of faith. Of the countless sects into which the christian church is divided,* it appears

* "Les Chrétiens (says Helvetius) qui donnaient avec justice le nom de barbarie et de crime aux cruautés qu' exerçaient sur eux les payens, ne donnèrent-ils pas le nom de zèle aux

that each, " dark with excessive light," arrogates to itself an infallible spirit, which shuts the gates of mercy on the rest of mankind, while it condemns or opposes to the utmost stretch* of its ability, all whose faith

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cruautés qu'ils exerçaient à leur tour sur ces mêmes payens ?"—" Did not the Christians, who justly gave the epithets of *barbarity* and *crime* to the cruelties inflicted on them by the pagans, dignify with the name of *zeal* those cruelties which they retaliated in their turn ?"

* " Je considerais cette diversité des sectes qui regnent sur la terre, et s'accusent mutuellement de mensonge et d'erreur; je demandais, quelle est la bonne ? chacune me repondait, ' *c'est la mienne ;*' chacune me disait, ' *moi seule,* et mes partisans pensent juste ; tous les autres sont dans l'erreur.' Et comment savez-vous que votre secte est la bonne ? ' Parceque

is not measured by the standard of its own peculiar creed. All perhaps are alike zealots; the difference is,

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Dieu l'a dit. 'Et qui vous dit que Dieu l'a dit? 'Mon pasteur, qui le sait bien; mon pasteur me dit, et ainsi croire, *et ainsi je crois!* —il m'assure que tous ceux qui disent autrement que lui *mentent,* et je ne les écoute pas."—*Emile,* t. 9 l. 4.——"While I surveyed this diversity of sects prevailing on the face of the earth, and accusing one another of error and falsehood, I inquired, 'Which is the right?' Each replied: 'It is ours: we alone possess the truth, and all others are in mistake.' —'And how do you know this?'—'Because God himself has declared it'—'Who told you so?'—'Our minister, who is well acquainted with the divine will: he has ordered us to believe this, and accordingly we do believe it. He assures us that all who contradict him speak false, and therefore we do not listen to them."

that the zeal of some is their privilege, and of others their crime.* The Irish, nationally considered with respect to their prevailing religion, never were a bigoted people, though the vivacity of their imagination has sometimes devoted them to superstitious illusion. When christianity took the lead of druidism in Ireland, it was preserved and nurtured by the same mild principles of toleration,

* "Hélas! si l'homme est aveugle, ce qui fait son tourment, fera-t-il encore son crime?" *De Volney*, ch. iv. p. 24.——"Alas! if man is blind, shall this blindness, which constitutes his misery, be also imputed to him as a crime?"

as suffered its admission; and though the druidical tenets flourished for two centuries after the arrival of the first christian missionary in the island, yet neither historic record, nor oral tradition, advances any detail of religious persecution adopted on either side. The tenets preached by the christian missionary, or the arguments opposed by the heathen controvertist, awakened no further interest in the public consideration, than a desire to embrace that mode of faith, which came home with most force to reason, and to truth. If the arguments held out were not always attended

with conviction, the doubtful superiority was never decided at the sword's point; if the cross was sometimes unavailingly raised, the arm* which supported it was protected from injury by the egis of toleration; nor were tortures invented, persecution enforced, or oppressions exercised, to obtain the abjuration of a long-cherished tenet, to prove the orthodoxy of a doctrinal point, or to establish the infallibility of a spe-

* "Can that church be the church of Christ," says the tolerant bishop of Novogorod, "whose arm is red to the shoulder with human gore?"

culative theory.* As yet free from that fanatic spirit which strews the earth with human victims, and still "opposes man against the murderer man," the Irish would have rejected with horror and incredulity that

* "César et Pompée," says Voltaire in his English Letters, "ne se sont pas fait la guerre pour savoir si les *poulets sacrées* doivent *manger* et *boir*, ou bien manger seulement; ni pour savoir si les prêtres devaient sacrifier avec leur chemise sur leur habit, ou leur habit sur leur chemise. Non! ces horreurs étaient réservés pour *la réligion de la charité*."—"Cesar and Pompey did not fight to determine whether the consecrated fowl ought to eat and drink, or to eat only; nor whether the priests should officiate with their surplice over their gown, or their gown over their surplice. No: these horrors were reserved for the religion of charity."

prophecy, which should have foretold such a series of religious barbarities as attended the expulsion of the Moors from Spain, the *conversion* of the Mexicans in America, the revocation of the edict of Nantz, and the establishment of the popery laws in their own country.

Surely the experience of successive ages should hold out some beacon to those minds, which the pernicious and illusory light of intolerance misleads; and evince the dreadful effects which have been invariably produced, by suffering an abstract opinion to prevail over the

social affection of mankind, either in politics or in religion.*

* The catholics of that part of Silesia conquered by Frederic the Great, were so sensible of the toleration they enjoyed from the liberal conduct of their conqueror, that they have ever since remained faithful to the Prussians; while those of their compatriots, who had successfully resisted his victorious arms, have since submitted to the French influence.

The toleration of the Germans on religious points, is deservedly proverbial. The patron of Luther, and the first protestant potentate, was an elector of Saxony; and notwithstanding the present electoral family has for four generations back been Roman-catholics, they continue to live in the most perfect harmony with their Protestant subjects.

Catherine of Russia dispersed among her Mahometan subjects eighty thousand copies of the Korân; while among her Christian subjects she circulated such works as were likely

to establish them most firmly in their religion. Yet, during her long and prosperous reign, the voice of revolt or insurrection was never heard to murmur. But in what age, or in what country, has Toleration displayed her radiant banner, and found her standard deserted by peace, by happiness, and unanimity?

SKETCH VI.

At a period when national taste, like national spirit, lingers through its last era of decay in the Irish breast, it is as rare as it is delightful to meet with one, for whom every relic of Irish antiquity possesses a peculiar interest; who contemplates with pleasure even the least-important production of ancient wit, in his own country; and by an association of ideas which have their source in the *amor*

patriæ, values every little relic as exhibiting some genuine though minute testimony of that progress in the refinements of life, which he fondly believes distinguished his native land, in those days when she was looked upon with admiration and respect by the people of other nations, and regarded with triumph by her own.

To the national taste of Mr. O*** of C*** house (in the bosom of whose charming family I have spent some days since my arrival in this province, the remembrance of which neither my memory nor my heart will

be apt to relinquish), I stand highly indebted for what might be considered as a *bonne bouche* to the hitherto unsatisfied appetite of national *virtu*. His library is stored with antiquities discovered amidst adjacent ruins. or dug out of the bogs on his own estate. Among those which peculiarly struck me were:

An urn *, composed of the finest clay, highly polished, elegantly formed, and curiously carved. It was dug

* This urn exactly resembles that described by Ware, and delineated by Vallancey in his Collectanea.

out of a sand-hill on the sea-shore near C* * * house: and found nearly filled with ashes and a kind of bituminous stuff, over which was placed a beautiful lozenge of thin variegated marble, once perhaps marked with an inscription now entirely defaced. The urn most probably contained the ashes of some Milesian prince, or sacred druid, to whom, in days of paganism, this privilege alone was accorded; for when the body of the warrior was consigned to the earth, his arms were buried with him. Thus the ancient Irish (like the ancient Etruscans) used both modes of inhumation at the same time: and

with that pertinacious adherence to the distinction of the different orders of the state, which marked their ancient *regime*, the inequality of rank and office was ascertained beyond the limits of the grave; and their love of order and subordination betrayed itself, where even all human distinction cease to be observed.

A *stylus* made of brass, and curiously engraved, particularly engaged my attention: and when I learnt that it was found in a deep grave amidst the ruins of Sligo abbey, the busy agency of fancy endowed it with

an interest it probably had no claim to; and as I gazed on its point, I imagined that he who had carried it with him to the tomb, and made it his companion in death, had probably made it the confidant of his thoughts, and the herald of his hopes, when living. It might have been the property of some young monk of St. Dominic; the vehicle of his sufferings and his love to some self-devoted Heloise, immured within the "relentless walls" of a neighbouring convent. But whether it was devoted to the service of love or of religion, to detailing the miracles of a saint or the charms of a mistress,

it interested me from the fanciful speculations it gave rise to.

Two *rings*, dug out of some neighbouring ruins, the one studded with brass knobs, the other constructed of brass loops; and both resembling the talisman described by Vallancey.

Disposed by the ardour of their imagination to every illusion of superstitious errror, in no nation whatever were charms more prevailing than among the ancient Irish. The warrior or the knight never entered the field of battle without his ring

or amulet; and on the fair bosoms of the noblest dames, sparkled the consecrated talisman. Papal policy, taking advantage of this national superstition, consecrated seals, which were called absolution-seals†, and bore the following inscription: "Multitude of pardons to the sons of the son of ***," &c. These were disposed of by the Romish see to the confessors: who enriched themselves by the traffic of salvation; and retailed the remission of sins at the high-

† One of these absolution-seals, once the property of a priest, was lately in the possession of Arthur Wolf, esq.

est price that timid penitence could give, or exorbitant priestcraft extort.

A *bridle, bit,* and *head-stall,* of a very curious description, made of brass, and found in a bog in the vicinity. On the top of the head-stall was a little pillar of brass elegantly formed, which was most probably erected for the purpose of sustaining the plume of feathers which decorated the proud head of the Beltenebros of some puissant knight of the valley: and indeed the finely carved spur which accompanied it, proved it the property of some Sir Launcelot or Sir Bertram.

A *brass hatchet*, dug out of a bog in Terreragh, and exactly resembling that called by the ancient Irish *tuah snaight;* derived says general Vallancey, from the Chaldee *tuah*, to strike. A *small spear* or *pike*, the well known *laineach cutha* of the ancient Irish.

A *brazen sword*, twenty-two inches long, and exactly formed like that which general Vallancey describes as resembling the sword found in the plains of Canac. It had been dug out of a bog by a peasant; whose good dame, having performed the same operation on its rusty blade

as destroyed the value of the shield of Martinus Scriblerus, converted it to the domestic purposes of a hatchet, from which degrading metamorphose Mr. O*** rescued this trusty weapon of some Irish Rolando or Rogero.

An ancient *Irish brogue,* remarkable for the neatness of its form; made of thin tanned leather, fastened above the ancle in a manner both convenient and tasteful, and closely resembling the Roman buskin.

A *small box* of beautiful marble, of an octagon form, the lid very

delicately carved, and covered with inscriptions in a character resembling the Persic. It was found among the ruins of Sligo abbey, and was probably the *bon-bonnière* of some self-denying monk.

Many other national relics presented themselves to my observation, which, though too numerous to detail, possessed scarcely less interest than those I have mentioned; though certainly not more so than the remains of druidical Cromlech, which rose almost immediately beneath the windows of the library.

SKETCH VII.

WHILE the mind, by an association of its ideas, discovers "a spell of attraction" in every thing (however intrinsically valueless) which carries with its protracted existence the character of ages gone by "with years beyond the Flood; "of objects which time has rescued from the vicissitude of human events, and which tradition has connected with incidents of

historic interest; it pursues with an opposite sensation of delight, every thing in the moral or natural world, which is touched by the charm of novelty, or which owes its interest to the rarity of its existence. Thus the most sublime objects of the creation excite a less animated sensation in observance than the *lusus naturæ*, whose singularity is probably its only excellence. This observation insensibly suggested itself, as I turned with indifference from a very noble view of the ocean, to behold with eager curiosity the water-flight of Glencar.

The water-flight of Glencar derives its source from the summit of a lofty hill, whose base it scarcely reaches (if the wind is in a certain point); there it is again carried perpendicularly back, forming a species of water-spout. Nothing can be more splendidly beautiful than its appearance when seen under the influence of an unclouded sun, rising like a pillar of light: the least variation of the air breaks it into a feathery spray, which falls at a considerable distance, like the misty shower of a summer's evening tinged with the departing glow of the horizon.

Nor is the water-flight of Glencar the only aquatic curiosity in the neighbourhood of Sligo. The hill of Knock-na-shong, or the Hill of the Hawk, is from its elevation the first point of land seen on this coast at sea, and has become a kind of land-mark to mariners. Yet notwithstanding its altitude, and its distance from the shore, its summit contains a small well, which ebbs and flows with the tide. Of both the mountain and the well, tradition has preserved many miraculous tales.

SKETCH VIII.

THE poverty of the lower orders of every nation is always found to derive its source less from national vice, than political grievance. The poverty of the lower orders of the Irish is equally obvious in its causes, and melancholy in its effects. At certain seasons of the year, the high-roads, and even the main streets, of every town and village of Ireland, are infested with

groupes of mendicants, who exhibit to the eye all the sad variety of wretchedness which " flesh is heir to." These are not common beggars, who make it a profession to live at the expence of the community; and who indulge their propensities to idleness and vice, by imposing on the unregulated benevolence of those

" Whose pity gives ere charity begins :"

they are the necessitous families of the Irish peasants.

When the season of employment is over, when the necessity for human

labour is considerably disproportioned to the population of the country (as is invariably the case in all grazing-counties of Ireland), where no manufactory offers the avocation to the superflux of willing industry; and when the scanty hire of the labourer, during the short season it is paid, affords no little treasure stored to ward off the wants of an inactive season; the Irish peasant quits the spot where he once

"Sat him down the monarch of a shed;"

quits the family, dearer to his heart from the pang it feels for them; and beckoned by hope, or urged by de-

pair, departs for a distant province, or even a distant land, in search of that employment, and that reward, which his own impoliticly denies.

When the strained eye of sorrowing affection has followed the father and the husband, even till fancy gives what distance snatches from its view, the mother closes the door of her desolate cabin; and when (as is generally the case) her family are too helpless to relinquish her maternal cares and enable her to work, followed by her little children, and frequently by an aged parent, beggary is embraced as the only alternative to want and

famine *. Sometimes with an infant on her back, and another in her arms, (while the ablest of her little train is always charged with the tin

* I this day overtook a mendicant groupe who were with difficulty creeping on before me: the mother, a delicate-looking woman, had a child on her back, another infant in a deep decay hung on the shoulder of a girl of twelve years old, and two more little ones followed. I asked the woman, what profession her husband was of: she said, "he was a slave;" for it is by this term that the labouring peasantry of Ireland invariably designate themselves. The woman looked ill: I inquired the cause. She replied that in those cabins where they gave her a lodging "for God's sake," she had for some nights back lain on wet straw, the rain which had continued for some days having penetrated through the roof of her lodging.

vessel which carries the sour milk supplied by charity, and another infant wanderer sustains the weight of the blanket which constitutes the only covering thrown over them at night), she commences her sad and solitary wanderings. How frequently, and in what opposite seasons, have I beheld these helpless and wretched groupes straggling along the high-roads, or reposing their wearied limbs beneath the shelter of a ditch! I have seen the feet of the heavily-laden mother totter through winter snows beneath her tender burthen: while the frost-bitten limbs of her infant companions drew tears to their eyes, which

in the happy thoughtlessness of childhood had never been shed to the unconscious misery of their situation, had not bodily pain taught them to flow.

I have met them wandering over those heaths, which afforded no shelter to their aching brows, amidst the meridian ardours of a summer's day; when violent heat and insupportable fatigue, rendered the stream they stooped to drink a luxury the most exquisite. I have met them at the door of magisterial power, and seen them spurned from its threshold by him who should have re-

dressed their grievances or relieved their wants; and I have seen them cheerfully received into the cabin of an equally humble, but more fortunate compatriot, where their wants were a recommendation to benevolence, and their number no check to its exertion. For never yet was the door of an Irish cabin closed against the suppliant who appealed to the humanity of its owner *.

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* As soon as a mendicant groupe appears at their door, it receives the accustomed kead-mille-a faltha; the circle round the fire is enlarged; a fresh supply of potatoes brought forward; and shelter for the night, and clean straw to repose on, voluntarily offered.

In Ireland there are no poor-laws. In Ireland the reins of magisterial influence are loosely held; and those to whose hands they are consigned are seldom stimulated to exertion, where self-interest, or party prejudice, affords no powerful incentive. The ill-conducted police of the country-towns of Ireland is a national disgrace; while that countless hordes of wretches are suffered to wander unrelieved, and indeed unnoticed, is a stain on national humanity. Casual bounty can afford but transient redress: it lies to a certain degree within the jurisdiction of the magistracy, to render that bounty unnecessary by

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examining into the causes of that wretchedness which so frequently appeals to it; and by either endeavouring to redress the grievance, or punish the imposition, which equally fling an odium on the character of that country whose negligent police has so long slumbered over both *. The establishment of manufactories in the remote parts of Ireland, would un-

* The inhabitants of Crete (says Montesquieu) used a very singular method to keep the principal magistrates dependant on the laws: part of the citizens rose up in arms, put the magistrates to flight, and obliged them to return to a private life. This was supposed to be done in consequence of the law.

doubtedly be the most effectual check to the progress of mendicancy; but can there be no medium adopted between the great extremes of idle poverty and affluent industry?

SKETCH IX.

I AM at present residing in that part of Ireland where the association of thrashers first arose. I am consequently surrounded by those who formed that association: a peasantry poor, laborious, vehement, and enterprising; capable of good or ill, in the extremes of both; left to the devious impulse of either; but oftener impelled by the hardest necessity to the latter, than allured to the

former, by kindness, by precept, or reward. Punished with rigorous severity when acting wrong, but neglected, unnoticed, and unrecompensed when acting right; forming the last link in the chain of human society, and treated with contempt because unable to resist oppression. It was with one of these beings, who in the strictest sense, daily performed "the penalty of Adam," and nightly (perhaps) assumed the daring character of insurgency, that I had some days back the following conversation:

"Are you laying in your winter's

fire?"—"No, young lady, I am cutting this turf for his honour."

"What is your hire by the day?"—"Sixpence one half, and threepence the other half of the year*."

"Have you a family?"—"I have a wife and six children."

"Then of course you must have some ground for their maintenance?"

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* I have been assured, however, that sixpence a day, throughout the year, is in general the averaged hire in most parts of Connaught. Many persons still living remember it so low as fourpence.

—"Oh! yes, two acres at 5*l.* an acre; but what with the tythe proctor, the priest's dues being raised, and the weaver having doubled his prices, that day goes by well enough, when we can afford a drop of milk to moisten the potatoes for the young ones."

He paused for a moment, cast his eyes to heaven, shook his head expressively, and then abruptly applied himself to his labour with an effort of overstrained exertion, that seemed to derive its energy from feelings that dewed his rough cheek

with tears, flowing from the sad heart of the father and the husband.*

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* Since the above was written, a young peasant in Westmeath gave me the following account of his family, which I believe is an epitome of the general state of the peasantry in a county not 30 miles from the metropolis. The boy was the eldest of seven children though scarcely twelve years old, and of course the only one able to labour; in the summer and harvest season he earned fourpence a day, his father worked for sixpence and eightpence a day through the year; they paid six pounds for an acre of oats, forty shillings a year for grass for their cow, and forty shillings for their cabin and a little ground for their potatoes; in winter when the cow was dry, they lived upon oaten bread, and potatoes and salt. Engaged with the care of seven children, the mother could give little assistance except by spinning sometimes: and out of the year's hire of the father, Sundays and holidays were deducted.

"If we do not go to the very origin and first ruling cause of a grievance," (says Edmund Burke), "we do nothing:" and if we resort to the light of truth and evidence of fact, it will be found that with respect to every national grievance or political disorder in Ireland, for nearly five hundred years back, a mode of conduct has been pursued, partial in its effects, unavailing in its influence, and nutritive to public evil by an apparent blindness to the pristine existence of that evil, and by the rigidly coercive measures exerted against its natural but fatal effects. Still careless and perhaps ignorant of the

cause, still attentive only to the result, the rest of discontent has only invigorated, by the topping of its branches, and the pruning of its suckers.

The first settlement of the English colonists in the island took place at a moment peculiarly favourable to such an enterprize: the devotional enthusiasm with which the Irish had applied themselves to letters, to the arts of poesy and song, and all their elegant, but frequently enervating concomitants, left them but ill qualified to oppose an hostile and savage enemy; and sharing the inevit-

able destiny of all polished nations in a certain era of refinement, they sunk beneath the daring inroads of such barbarians as Greece has submitted to, and Rome was unable to oppose. To those who believe their fate has reached its climax of evil, every doubt wears the aspect of a hope, and every change the character of a benefit; and the arrival of a few English barons and their followers on the Irish coast, at a moment when the Irish spirit was harassed by the ceaseless suffering of civil dissension, awaken a consolatory expectation, and gave to the politic

strangers the air of protectors and the epithet of friends.

From that moment the mass of the Irish people became affectionate to the British government; and if the attestations of historians * are to be credited, if the native tone of the minds of the Irish was attentively studied, it will be found that though

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* "I am well assured that the Irish desired to be admitted to the benefit of English law, not only in their petitions," &c.—DAVIS, p. 88.

It was a circumstance however not a little flattering to the Irish, that while the benefit of English laws was denied them, the English colonists adopted the ancient Irish system of legislation.

that affection may be forced, it can never be voluntarily or causelessly withdrawn from its object.

But the government they (the Irish) loved, was still counteracted in every intention formed in their favour. The claims which they made in the expecting confidence of their hearts, remained unrealized, because they were unheard:* for it was ever, as it is now, the singular destiny of

* "It is not," says the poet Saadi, "the timid voice of a minister which can breathe to the ears of his king the complaints of the unhappy: it is the cry of the people only that should ascend directly to the throne."

Ireland to nourish within her own bosom her bitterest enemies, who, with a species of political vampyrism, destroyed that source from whence their own nutriment flowed. For still did they, who partially ruled over one country under the influence of the other, close every avenue to mutual and conciliating intelligence; and invariably endeavoured to effect a separation, from which *they* alone derived a benefit—a benefit, however, precarious and unstable, as it was selfish and unjust.

It was in vain that the Irish of

other times, testified their anxiety to be admitted to the protection of the laws of England; it was in vain (even so early as the reign of Edward III.) that they endeavoured to represent the good that would naturally accrue from denization. "For still," (says Sir John Davis), "the great lords of Ireland informed the king, that the Irish might not be naturalized without damage and prejudice to the crown, or themselves;"* and perhaps it is no unfounded as-

* "All the statutes from Henry IV. to Henry VII. speak of English rebels, and Irish enemies, as if the Irish had never been in the condition of subjects, but always out of the law."

sertion to advance, that the same disposition on the part of the Irish to the English government, and the same obstacle to its accomplishment on the part of their internal enemies, still exist with undiminished force.* Few countries ever suffered more from the ceaseless vicissitudes of civil dissension, than Ireland; and none ever preserved a more general uniformity of character, disposition,

* The genius of Palermo (kept in the senatorial palace) is represented as a man with a serpent on his breast, and this motto, *Alienos nutrit, se ipsum devorat*; a figure that might answer equally well for the personification of Ireland.

and principle, both as to its internal and relative situation, for ages back. The same grievances have furnished the same complaints, and the same causes invariably produced the same effects. The Irish heart was ever, and is still, warmly alive to the least appearance of confidence and kindness. The Irish spirit has ever been and ever will be, prompt to resist, what it would be dishonour to endure.

It is a corroborating proof of the unvarying system of things in this country, that an assertion of the able minister of Elizabeth relative to the

antecedent and then existing state of Ireland, may be in some respects applied to its present circumstances, viz. "That certain great men of Ireland cross and withstand the enfranchisement of the Irish: whereunto (he adds) I must acquit the crown of England of ill policy, and lay the fault upon the pride, covetousness, and ill counsel, of the English planted here."* The line of demarcation

* "When," says Burke, "the warfare of chicane succeeded to the war of arms and of hostility, statutes and a regular series of operation was carried on (particularly from Chichester's time) in the ordinary courts of justice; and by special commissions and inquisitions, first under pretence of tenures, and then

which distinguished the English-Irish from the native, is now indeed smoothed away by the obliviating finger of time; but the sordid spirit and unpatriotic principles, which guided the views, and directed the actions of the naturalized foreigner, still survive in the breasts of some who have no other claim to the title of Irishmen, than that which the accident of nativity bestows; who,

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of titles in the crown, for the purpose of the total extirpation of the interest of the natives in their own soil: until this species of subtle ravage, being carried to the last excess of oppression and insolence under lord Stafford, kindled the flames of that rebellion which broke out in 1641.

unaffectionate to their compatriots, and unendeared to their country, resolve every principle into self; and give to every local disturbance that terrific aspect of public danger, which extends the empire of individual influence, and strengthens the chain of general oppression.* This perhaps was never more strongly evinced than by those efforts made to misrepresent the recent rising of the thrashers; and to call and punish that as a rebellion, which an officer of the

* It is perhaps necessary to mention, that this sketch was begun and finished at two different and distant periods.

crown, even in the act of pleading against the association alluded to, declares "as not partaking of any political complexion, or confined to any particular party or persuasion;" and that "its professed object was to regulate the payments of the church-tythes, of certain dues paid to the clergymen of the catholic church, and the rates of manual and manufacturing labour."*

It is indeed a fact incontrovertible,

* While the peasant of Ireland labours from sun-rise to sun-set, for sixpence a day, the working mechanic regulates his prices by his desires, and the extortion of three days enables him to be idle and inebriate the other four.

and asserted by those employed on the part of the crown against the persons termed thrashers, that this association had its rise in that source which at various and distant periods has given birth to such numerous associations among the Irish peasantry: associations unknown perhaps in any other country in the world, and which, animated by the same principle, and sanctioned by the same plea of grievance, have taken the various names of *white boys, hearts of steel, hearts of oak, break-of-day boys, right boys, defenders,* and *thrashers.* Yet from the first whisper of insurrection, to its last mur-

mur, the complaint of the people never breathed upon the government,* and their accusations were as local as the grievances which gave birth to them: but every pecuniary ex-

* A few days back, I met with two peasants who were making complaints of the oppression they endured. A gentleman asked them if they thought they were worse off since the union. They replied, "they had never heard any thing about the union, and did not know what it meant." After some further questions, they were asked "if they did not know that there was now no Irish parliament. They replied, that all they had heard was, that the parliament-books were sent away, and that the good luck of the country went with them. So full is the heart of an Irish peasant of his own grievance, and so little is his head troubled about public affairs.

action unjustly and exorbitantly levied on those whose hard-earned little "just gives what life requires, and gives no more," becomes an object of consideration; and while with willing cheerfulness they contribute to the maintenance of the ministers of one church, and from a principle of duty and affection voluntarily support that of another,* it is little

* "It is no slight evil for a country sinking under the weight of taxes, to support a double hierarchy; and some share of the expence might perhaps, without injustice, be defrayed from the revenues of the present establishment, in parishes where every inhabitant is a catholic."—*Review of Sir J. Throgmorton on the Catholic Question.*

to be wondered at, if that extortion which drives them to the very barrier of penury and want, should sometimes impel them beyond that of prudence and subordination.*

In the present instance they endeavour to palliate their conduct, by asserting, that to the usual exorbitant demands of the tythe,†

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* Lands in Ireland are generally held on freehold leases, which throws the burthen of tithes upon the tenant chiefly: the collection being also principally in kind, renders it of course more odious, and the alternative is become insupportable from the extortion of the tythe farmers.—*Ibid.*

† The payment of tythes among the Jews

farmers, were added the increasing exactions of the middle-man, the impositions of the weaver, and the increased dues of the catholic clergy.

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formed a part of the foundation of their republic; but on their first introduction into Christendom, Charlemagne, who established them, found them opposed by the people; "who (says Montesquieu) are rarely influenced by example, to sacrifice their interests," and who considered them "as burthens quite independant of the other charges of the establishment." A synod of Frankfort had recourse to their superstition to ensure their obedience, by protesting, that in the last famine the spikes of corn were found to contain no seed, the infernal spirits having devoured it all; and that those spirits had been heard to reproach them with not having paid the tythes." Book xxxi. 339.

These (they asserted) were exactions which sixpence a day was scarcely adequate to answer. These perhaps were the efficient causes which gave to the pitying eye of the traveller, roofless cabins, desponding countenances, squalid figures, and shuddering groups of literally naked children; these were perhaps the latent sources of those emotions in which the lower orders of this country have been so frequently involved, and the main spring of that coalition of imprudent and unfortunate persons called thrashers; who daringly seized in their own hands the power of summary retribution, proportioned

and appropriate as they conceived to their real or fancied grievances, and according to the strict letter of their own old Brehon law. That they did thus dare to seize the means of redress in their own hands, was a conduct that no one can justify; but that any other mode was left them, is a fact no one can establish.

The English country-gentleman, full of patriarchal kindness towards his tenantry, will ask, "Why did not these unfortunates apply for counsel and assistance to their landlord, their paternal adviser and advocate?" But that tie, so firmly

bound in days of feudal influence, and which still in a modified sense in most countries unites the extremes of civil society, the lord of the soil to the peasant who cultivates it, in Ireland is broken, or rather wholly dissolved: and the Irish peasant, while he venerates the name of the good old family under whom his forefathers worked, or for whom his forefathers bled, has now but the name only to revere; while his heart turns despondingly from the middleman, beneath whose influence he lives; and who would scarcely ameliorate his grievances, while conscious

that he was himself the cause of many, and the sanction of all.

It ever was, and is still, the conduct of a certain order of persons in Ireland, to shadow the light of government from the mass of the Irish people; to give to causes of local and domestic disturbance, the invidious term of open rebellion; and to drive by pitiless unkindness to acts of fatal desperation, a people who may be soothed into subjection, but who can never be harassed into a tame endurance of oppression; a people whose national character affords the noblest subject to philosophical ob-

servance, that human nature ever presented to the eye of reason and philanthropy.*

When the thrashers first attracted notice in those counties where they first arose, it was not unusual to hear (even from those whose opinion carried most weight) that there was some ground for complaint among

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* "Nations are governed by the same methods, and on the same principles, by which an individual, without authority, is often able to govern those who are his equals or his superiors; by a knowledge of their temper, and by a judicious management of it."—*Thoughts on the Causes of the present Discontents, &c. &c. Burke.*

the Connaught peasantry; the nocturnal adventures of the insurgents were then deemed rather whimsical than mischievous; were sometimes listened to with indifference, or laughed at as ludicrous; but the natural consequences of all public commotions, however apparently unimportant in their tendency and trivial in their origin, from their too frequently experienced and fatal result, should have taught those in whose hands the reins of timely suppression were vested, the necessity of crushing the germ, if they had not the power of destroying its root. But if the invariable effects of a long-existing cause

were foreseen, no exertion was made towards their early extinction: the thrashers indeed were instantly called a miserable, deluded, and misguided people; degrading epithets, to which however Irish feelings have become almost callous. But among the many who thus designated their humbler compatriots, and reversing the maxim of Hamlet, taught them "to assume the vice they had not," who was the benevolent, the rational being, to step forth, to inquire into the cause of their discontent, to alleviate their sufferings, or dispel their delusion? Did the head landlord, did the middle-man, did the magis-

trates, collect around them their misguided countrymen, and with an apparent interest in their destiny, investigate the cause of their real, or probe the source of their fancied grievance, promising their best individual efforts to the removal of the one, or simply proving to their untutored understandings the fallacy and danger of the other? Oh, no! a vehement, an impetuous, a brave but misguided peasantry, careless of that life to which so few ties of human happiness attached them, unquestioned, unresisted, were suffered to accumulate in numbers, to strengthen in principle, to pursue that object which

their sense of right upheld to them; and neither redressed in one instance, nor opposed in another, to establish the justice of their cause on the basis of their progressive success; and to become inebriate with that flow of fortune which stronger heads seldom resist, and stronger minds seldom contemplate in its probable and approximating reflux.*

As long as the vengeance of the thrashers was confined to the tythe-

* The thrashers were suffered, for a considerable time, to pursue their depredations on the fields of the tythe-farmers, unmolested and almost unnoticed.

farmers, the middle-man smiled at a retribution so summarily used; but when its spreading effects threatened the most distant boundary of his own interest, he shrunk back upon himself with the same principle of repercussion as actuates the tarantula when, retiring to the centre of her web, she darts with accumulated venom on the daring insect who flutters within the sphere of her enslaving dominion.

It then became usual (from the well or ill-founded reports of every informer) for a few skirmishing parties to set out in quest of the insur-

gents; frequently to escape from the hall of social enjoyment, or the banquet of festal revelry, and "hot with the Tuscan grape," to pursue amidst the doubtful shades of night "the idle visions of a heated brain;" or (perhaps less strictly Quixotorial) to fire at random on such fugitives as chance presented to their observation.

That an insurrection which at this period wore so alarming an aspect ought not to have been suppressed in the first era of its existence, or firmly and decisively opposed in its state of maturer being, is there a mind so

weak or so inhuman as to assert? To that rational policy which is ever the "flail of faction," which is ever more solicitous to remove the grievance than to punish even the unjustifiable mode of redress imprudently seized on by the aggrieved, be it left to decide on the most efficacious mode to obviate the evil; but that the partial and summary coercion adopted by certain individuals, in the present instance, were neither correct in plan nor effective in execution, the result fully evinced.

It was indeed at last discovered, that though firing at an odd man of

an odd night might have been a chivalrous feat, it was far from being either a decisive or a successful one. Every bullet had not the political sagacity to lodge itself in the fervid brain of an insurgent: the innocent had sometimes a chance of suffering with the guilty: and though they might "fill a pit as well as better men," yet that cause was not weakened, whose professed opposers became obnoxious to the neutral as well as to the active party; while the moan of private sorrow mingled with the murmurs of public discontent, and the pang of individual an-

guish exasperated the feelings of general disaffection.

But one mode now seemed left to destroy the hydra-monster of a hitherto unavailing vengeance; and unawed by the series of horrid events which, at no distant intervals, for the space of five hundred years have distracted and impoverished their country, a certain order of persons supplicated the governing power of their nation to erect once more the standard of civil discord, and to establish that law which every state reserves as its last resource against the unmasked appearance of open, daring,

and avowed rebellion! But what was the result of this *patriotic* application? At the moment when it was eagerly hoped that nothing would be seen "but man and steel, the soldier and the sword," the British government rushed between the mass of the people of Ireland and a few of her degenerate sons; and flinging the veil of her mercy over the errors of her imprudent but unalienated subjects, turned aside the poinard that aimed at the life-pulse of their hearts.

For ever honoured be the memory of that administration which gave to

the unhappy, the deluded people of Ireland, the full benefit of that sacred justice coeval with truth and with the God of Truth; who, deaf to the interested application of the few, rescued the many from destruction; who mercifully refused to send back the visionary insurgent to his comfortless hut, to brood (in the midst of his helpless family) over that grievance as poignant in idea as in fact, and which, neither redressed nor contradicted, would rankle with added force in his disappointed heart; who saved the hard-earned pittance of the laborious peasant from the ravages of licensed insolence and the oppression

of delegated power; who turned aside the musket that would have awed the oppressed master in that home, where (though but the shelter of a banana-tree from the rays of a vertical sun) even the slave feels himself a king; and who gave to the free-born subjects of the freest of all earthly states, the fair occasion to expose the cause by which they believed themselves aggrieved, and to prove how far the effects were "to be extenuated," or had been "set down in malice!" *

* How firmly attached the Irish have ever been to the laws of England, and inimical to

It was reserved for the representative of the illustrious house of Russel to be the agent of that divine mission, which had for its object the peace and welfare of a nation; and surely in that record where the gra-

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the slightest appearance of military subjection, is not only proved by Sir John Davis and his cotemporaries, but strongly alluded to by Burke in his speech on the conciliation with America. "After," says he, "the vain project of military government attempted in the reign of Elizabeth, it was soon discovered that nothing could make Ireland English in civility and allegiance, but your laws and your form of legislature. It was not English arms, but the English constitution, that conquered Ireland."

titude of Ireland has traced in imperishable characters the names of her best friends, his will not be registered in an oblivious page.

SKETCH X.

"In Ireland," says a modern writer, "the harpers (the original composers and depositaries of their music) have till lately been uniformly cherished and supported by the nobility and gentry." It is indeed but too true, that that warm ardent spirit of national enthusiasm which hung delighted on the song of national melody, to which many an associated idea, many an endeared feeling, lent their superadded charm,

has now faded into apathy; and neither the native strain, nor native sentiment, which gave it soul, touches on the spring of national sensibility, or awakens the dormant energy of national taste. The ear, desultory in its musical enjoyments, formed to the style of foreign harmony, and scholared into taste by the theories of recondite science, may indeed no longer convey to the heart that poignant thrill of national emotion which shakes the firm-nerved Swiss "even to dissolution," when the strain of his mountain-liberty * abruptly floats

* Were the feelings of national liberty and national affliction to be illustrated by a sound,

on his awakened sense. But oh! surely that untravelled heart, which has never felt the throb of absence far from the home of its affection, that unsophisticated sense which has never dissolved to the impassioned influence of Italian composition, might still hang with national pride and national delight upon those strains which owe their birth to the musical genius of their native country, upon those strains which harmonize with every emotion of the soul, and which whether breathed in

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the *Bentzr-de-Vaches* and *Erin go brach* would surely be found to inspire their essence.

sorrow or in joy, are still true to nature and nature's dearest feelings.

The enthusiastic passion for music* which has ever distinguished the people of Ireland, still remains unabated; but by the puerile vanity of adopting a refinement which removes the ear from the heart, their own

* A few evenings ago, Mr. O'Neil the harper assured a friend of mine, that having been received into the house of a Mr. Irvine of this country about fifty years past, he found assembled thirty-seven musicians, professional and private. "I made," he added, "the thirty-eighth; and before we concluded the evening, a piper claimed admittance, and according to the good old Irish custom was received, and accommodated with a good supper and bed."

beautiful airs are the only compositions which now fail to attract their notice or secure their admiration: yet let me not (in the ardour of that indignation which swells my heart for my native country), while I behold the indifference, the neglect with which she is in so many instances contemplated by many of her own children, let me not forget how often and how recently I have beheld the most animated emotions produced in an Irish heart by the influence of an Irish song: how often I have beheld the sweet testimony of a feeling tear shed to the witchery of a national strain, even in those circles

where the polish of fashion had smoothed down the energetic sensibilities of nature; and where taste and science too frequently regulate the empire of opinion, independant of the feelings of the heart, independant of the sentiments of the mind. There are still few houses in the interior parts of Ireland, where a musician of some description is not constantly retained or welcomely received; who in coincidence with the prevailing gusto of the day, is always more ready to play a German waltz than a jig, or a French cotillion than a planxty. But Irish harpers (once so cherished and revered) are as rarely to be met

with as encouragement to Irish music. A very old and a very wretched being, with an ill-strung instrument of great antiquity suspended from his bending shoulder, is sometimes seen creeping along the road-side, supplicating at the gates of a great man's mansion, or hailed at the door of a poor man's hut. But with a taste for national music has subsided all encouragement to its professors.*

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* The bardic order however is by no means extinct in Ireland. What they were, and what they are still capable of being, the venerable O'Neil is a striking instance. Many female harpers still wander through the remote parts of Ireland. At the harper's prize-ball at Gra-

The Irish peasant indeed still retains an idolatrous fondness for those strains his ear has learnt from his heart: a song beguiles the labours of the day; a song ushers in the repose of the night; a song effuses his joys, and a song is the interpreter of his sorrows. Of the latter fact the following circumstance is illustrative:

But a few days back, a musical

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nard in 1782, a woman of the name of Bridges obtained the second prize. The names of the female bards of other times were handed down for several generations, and repeated with devotional respect.

professor (from whom I had the anecdote) was walking in the vicinity of Sligo at a very early hour, when a sound, wild, low, and plaintive, sought his ear; and approaching the spot from whence it seemed to proceed, he observed an elderly female leaning over a little paling which encircled a cabin. Her hair was dishevelled, her eyes full of tears, and her voice, though broken and inarticulate, respired in the intervals of her deep-heaved sobs, a melancholy recitative accompanied by these simple words—"A few days are gone by; she entered this gate in all her beauty and her health; to-morrow

she will pass it without life, and she never will enter it more."* This funereal song was the impromptu *requiem* of a wretched mother, whose only daughter (a young and lovely girl) had expired the night before.

If we are to form our opinion of the original genius of Irish music

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* A parallel instance of parental and melodized affliction is to be found in Chandler's Travels into Asia Minor. "One evening coming from some ruins in a Greek village," says he, "we found an old woman sitting by the church on the grave of her daughter, who had been two years buried, over whom she lamented aloud, singing in an uniform and dismal cadence."

from the accounts handed down by Cambrensis, the pathos which it now betrays was certainly not its primeval character.

"But music," says lord Verulam, "feedeth the disposition which it findeth." The popular feelings of a nation may be frequently discovered to a certain degree, in the character and idiom of its native melodies; and the very key in which those melodies are composed, may give a refined intimation of the political circumstances under which they were first breathed. Thus the Irish during the long series of their sufferings, effused

not their tuneful sorrows in the cheery, open, fulness of the major mode. Their voices, broken and suppressed faintly, rose by minor thirds; and the sentiment of anguish communicated to the song of the persecuted bard (in less felicitous periods) by "his soul's sadness," still breathes in Irish music, even though the efficient cause from whence it stole its plaintive character may no longer exist.

That rapidity however which Cambrensis * remarks, is still preserved in

* "It is wonderful," says the archdeacon of St. David's, "how in such precipitate rapidity of the fingers the musical proportions are

a certain description of Irish song, where every note melodizes a word, and of which the fine old air of *Plai Racah na Rourk,* or O'Rourk's

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preserved, and by their art faultless throughout, in the midst of their complicated modulations and most intricate arrangement of notes, by a rapidity so sweet, an irregularity so regular, a concord so discordant. The melody is rendered perfect and harmonious whether the chords of the diapason or diapente are struck together; yet they always begin in a soft mode and end in the same, that all may be perfected in the sweetness of delicious sounds: then they enter on, and again leave their modulations, with much subtilty; and the tingling of the small strings sports with so much freedom under the deep notes of the bass, delights with so much delicacy, and sooths so softly, that the excellence of their art seems to lie in concealing it."

noble feast, is a very striking instance.*

So invariably do the Irish make the ear the path to the heart, so frequently is sound commingled with sentiment, and the affections of the mind with organic sensation, that even the prevailing superstition of the lower classes borrows much of its illusory creed from the exquisite sensibility of their ear; and supernatu-

* Even the most rapid Irish air, when played slow, will be found to contain some lurking shade of pathos, and even to possess something of that melancholy luxury of sound which characterises the Arabian music.

ral sounds are not only devoutly believed, but always expected, as the herald of an important event, or singular incident. Death itself is predicted by the melancholy moan of the benshi;* and the heaviest curse that vengeance breathes upon the object of its direst hatred is, "the screech of the morning be upon you;"† a curse never to be heard

* Mr. Walker ingeniously traces the origin of the benshi to the passing breeze brushing over the strings of the harp which the sorrowing bard hung up in the hall, on the death of his chief or patron.

† When the dawn rises for the first time on the remains of a beloved and deceased object, those feelings of sorrow which were till then

without a thrill of horror and emotion.

The inordinate passion which the Irish have in all ages betrayed for music, must have eventually produced an eager pursuit of such means as would tend to its gratification. Musical instrument-makers are in fact to be found in many of the smallest towns of Ireland, and ge-

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faintly expressed, or silently betrayed, become wild and vehement in their indulgence; and the shriek of despair which ushers in the dawn's grey light to the bed of death, may indeed well be considered as an anathema by the ear and the heart on which it falls.

nerally among men of the lowest professions. Some instances have come under my own observation, too singular to pass unnoticed.

In the town of Strabane, a poor man, originally a hedge-carpenter, obtained some degree of excellence in making violins and flutes, built a small organ, and was frequently called in by the most respectable families in the neighbourhood, to tune or mend piano-fortes, harpsichords, &c.

There is now resident in Dublin a young Connaught man, who works as a common carpenter, and who

has made a small piano on which he performs, self-taught in the theory of music as in the construction of a musical instrument.

A remarkably fine-toned organ with six stops has been lately placed in the Roman-catholic chapel at Mulingar, built by a poor wheelwright, a native of the town. He had commenced bagpipe-maker a few years before without any previous instruction, and shortly after completed a good piano-forte.

But the most striking and singular instance of this nature which this

(or perhaps any other) country presents, is exhibited in the musical and mechanical talents of Mr. John Egan, the only pedal-harp maker in Ireland. Brought up from his earliest youth to the labours of the anvil, Mr. Egan was still serving his time to a smith, when chance threw in his way a French harp. A natural fondness for music, and the curiosity and admiration excited by a first view of the most beautiful and picturesque of all instruments, induced him to examine its machinery; and all the money he possessed in the world was shortly after laid out in the purchase of such materials as

were requisite for the construction of a pedal harp, which he accomplished with so much success, as to find a high and immediate sale for it. He is now very extensively engaged in the business, and may be ranked among the first of the profession in Great Britain.* His harps however have one fault, which though it does not influence the opinion of

* By an invention of which he has all the merit, he has so simplified the machinery, that the springs hitherto found necessary to return the pedals, he has laid aside; which renders the harp less liable to go out of order, much easier to repair, and enables the ingenious inventor to sell a pedal harp nearly one-half cheaper than it could be imported.

true judges, or prevent their exportation to Scotland, and even to parts of England, is a frequent barrier to their sale in Ireland, namely, that their maker is an Irishman.

SKETCH XI.

THE barony of Tyreragh is a remote tract of land, skirting the most romantic part of the coast of Sligo; twenty-seven miles long, and sheltered by a continued chain of mountains, above whose varying elevation the "cloud-capt" summits of Knock-na-shoug, Knocka-chree, and Nephin-noble, are conspicuously distinguished. The old traditions of the country assert, that the barony of Tyreragh, as well as that of Tyraw-

ley, derived its name from Fion-mac-cumhal (or Fingal, the far-famed hero of Ossian's songs), as he stood on the summit of one of the Ox mountains, where he was devoting some days to the pleasures of the chace. My heart had long owed a pilgrimage to this remote, and, I believe, little-known barony; for it was the residence of the dear and respected friend for whom that heart had long throbbed with an invariable pulse of gratitude, tenderness, and affection. I had, indeed, long been anxious to indulge both my feelings, my curiosity and prevailing taste, by this visitation, which was

eminently productive of the highest gratification to all.

The road which leads from the town of Sligo to Tyreragh is varying and romantic in its aspect, hanging over the sea-coast, and beneath the shelter of the loftiest mountains. The bay of Sligo, the fairy land of Hazlewood, the distant heights of Benbo and Benbulbin; the opposite shores of the bay, crowned with the majesty of Knock-na-ree; a partial view of the town of Sligo; and the woods which skirt the adjacent lakes; are caught, and lost, at intervals, amidst the devious windings of the

road, which passes directly through the village of Ballysadere. This little village lies on the banks of a river which has its source in the mountains; and forms in its rapid course, over a steep and unequal bed, a beautiful succession of water-falls, which wear the singular appearance of an aquatic amphitheatre. The rapid and repulsed stream breaks over rocks from point to point, for the space of more than two hundred yards; till with congregated force it reaches the principal steep, which is upwards of fifteen feet perpendicular.

These romantic cataracts, when seen through the dark woods which

once surrounded them, and with the full relief of Knock-na-ree in the rear, must have ranked amongst the noblest scenic features in the world. Over the deepest of the falls, and on the point of a little promontory (which appears flung between the confluence of the river and the bay, into which it pours its waters) hang the ruins of an abbey, founded by St. Fitchin in the seventh century. It afterwards belonged to the regular canons of St. Austin, and during the intolerant persecutions carried on in this country in Elizabeth's day, the abbey, with all its revenues, was

bestowed on Brian Fitzwilliam, who assigned it over to Edward Crofton, escheator-general of Ireland, and founder of the Crofton family in this province.* I understand, that, till within these few years, the abbey was in some degree of preservation, and a fragment of the town still remains, which exhibits some traces of good masonry. Near Ballyredon lies

* Mr. Young asserts, that most of the gentlemen in this part of the country were Cromwell's soldiers, and many of them new settlers from Wales, as the Joneses, Morgans, Wynns, &c. &c. Many, however, of the descendants of the Milesian race are still to be found in it, and some among the most distinguished persons of the country, as the family of the O'Haras.

a lead-mine, which, though very rich, has never been worked with success; and Glanesk and Lockalt are but at an inconsiderable distance, while the luxurious island of Ylana-baolane, which forms the bay of Sligo, gives considerable interest to a vein of scenery, which wants nothing but plantation to render it the most picturesque imagination can devise, or nature present.

L*** house, the ancient family-seat of sir M***.* C***n, bart., was the goal of my little journey, and I reached its venerable avenue

at a season of the day peculiarly favourable to the soft *chiaro-oscura* of picturesque beauty: with the old gloomy avenue of an ancient mansion-seat, there is, I think, invariably connected a certain sentiment which bears the heart back to "other times," and awakens it to an emotion of tender reverence, and melancholy pleasure. For myself, I have never walked beneath its interwoven branches uninfluenced by a certain feeling, in which memory's pensive spell mingled with the speculations of awakened fancy.

The lands and demesne of L***

lie almost along the shores of the Atlantic ocean, and immediately beneath the shelter of Knockachree,* from whose rugged base swells the lesser chain of the Ox-mountains, whose sides were once covered with luxuriant woods, and from whose towering summit rush innumerable torrents, which lessening into streams in their deep descent, water the plains beneath, and flow into the ocean. The shores on the other side of the bay are romantic and striking; the

* Knockachree, or the "hill of the heart," when measured from the shore, is supposed to be one of the highest mountains in Ireland.

beautiful peninsula of Tandsago intervenes its cultivated landscapes, and most happily breaks the view, while the rude dashing of the waves against the bar, lends an effective sound; and the back scenery afforded by the mountains, wears a character of wildness and sublimity, which finishes a picture that betrays no deficiency but from that want under which it labours in common with the rest of the country, the want of plantation.

Of the old castle of L*** nothing now remains but a few fragments that mark its site, and are

strewed amidst the vegetation which covers a cave, the probable asylum of many an unhappy fugitive in days of civil horror, or religious persecution. Near the spot where the castle once frowned, moulders the ruin of a small building, whose dilapidated portal still bears a Spanish inscription, intimating that it was the "retreat of a priest and his yellow-haired companion." It was in fact erected, as tradition asserts, by one of the lords of the castle, for his youngest son, who had in the Elizabethian day forfeited the revenues of an abbey of which he was superior; but whether the forfeiture arose from his

attachment to popery, or to the yellow-haired companion, oral history has preserved no record.

Near this retreat stands a small oratory or cell, furnished with a ruined altar, and some curiously carved heads of saints; while several fragments of rude sculptureand entablatures, with mottoes in Latin or Spanish, lie scattered around it.

In the traditional history of the barony, L***d holds a distinguished place. The castle, erected and long possessed by the O'Dowels (one of the most powerful families in Con-

naught), was besieged and taken by the clan of the Mac Swines; whose descendants in the reign of Elizabeth made it over, for a certain sum of money, with all the circumjacent lands, to Edward Crofton, an officer in Essex's army, and afterwards escheator-general of Ireland. That the lands of L***d were neither won by arms, nor seized on by licensed violence, from the original proprietors, is a circumstance well known to the neighbouring peasantry: one of them said to me, "L***d estate is not a debenture," which is a term applied to those properties made over by Cromwell to his soldiers: and the

liberality of the escheator-general has added a kind of reverence to the affection and respect which his lineal descendant has awakened in the hearts of his tenants, dependants, and followers.*

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* This term will only be understood in Ireland, where the "followers of the family" claim and receive the right of patronage, and too often of support and maintenance; it is a lingering custom of feudal times, which in many instances would be "more honoured in the breach than the observance."

END OF VOL. I.

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